

Message Text

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TO SECSTATE WASHDC 1487
INFO AMCONSUL CALCUTTA
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TAGS: PINT, PFOR, BG, IN

SUBJ: POLITICAL ACTIVITY TO RESUME IN AUGUST

1. AT A FIVE-HOUR MEETING WITH POLITICAL LEADERS JULY 27, PRESIDENT SAYEM DECLARED THAT THE BDG WAS COMMITTED TO HOLDING ELECTIONS NEXT FEBRUARY AND THAT POLITICAL ACTIVITIES WILL BE RESUMED BEFORE AUGUST 15. ACCORDING TO A LOCAL WIRE SERVICE REPORT, SAYEM SAID THAT ELECTIONS WOULD BE ON THE BASIS OF A PARLIAMENTARY FORM OF GOVERNMENT. THE HIGHLY PUBLICIZED MEETING AT BANGOBHAVAN WAS ATTENDED BY THE THREE DCMLAS, SPECIAL ASSISTANT TO THE PRESIDENT, MR. JUSTICE A. SATTAR, MEMBERS OF THE PRESIDENT'S COUNCIL OF ADVISORS AND 38 UNIDENTIFIED "LEADERS OF VARIOUS SHADES OF POLITICAL OPINION IN THE COUNTRY."

2. ACCORDING TO THE BSS VERSION OF THE MEETING (THE ONLY ONE PUBLISHED), THE POLITICAL LEADERS AGREED THAT "UN-BRIDLED POLITICAL ACTIVITY" SHOULD NOT BE ALLOWED AND THAT POLITICAL ACTIVITY SHOULD BE BASED ON "BANGLADESH NATIONALISM, INDEPENDENCE, FULL SOVEREIGNTY AND INTEGRITY." THE LEADERS "GENERALLY AGREED" THAT IN ORDER TO LIMIT THE NUMBER POLITICAL PARTIES, ANY PARTY IN THE ELECTIONS

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WOULD HAVE TO SECURE A MINIMUM OF TEN PERCENT OF THE TOTAL

NUMBER OF SEATS IN THE PARLIAMENT, OR ELSE THE PARTY WOULD BE DISSOLVED AND THE SEATS DECLARED VACANT. THE POLITICIANS REPORTEDLY ALSO AGREED AT THAT CODE OF CONDUCT SHOULD BE ESTABLISHED SO THAT ELECTIONS COULD BE HELD IN A PEACEFUL MANNER. IN THE INITIAL STAGES, SOME POLITICIANS SUGGESTED POLITICAL ACTIVITIES "SHOULD BE CONFINED THV INDOOR AND PROJECTION MEETING ON RADIO AND T.V."

3. THE NEWS REPORT ALSO SAID THAT THE POLITICAL LEADERS UNANIMOUSLY AGREED THAT VIOLATIONS OF THE BORDER BY MIS-CREANTS BASED IN INDIA WERE INFRINGEMENTS ON NATIONAL INDEPENDENCE AND SOVEREIGNTY AND THAT FARAKKA AND THE MARITIME BOUNDARY PROBLEM WERE "VITAL NATIONAL ISSUES."

4. COMMENT. THE LONG-AWAITED PUBLIC CONFIRMATION BY THE MARTIAL LAW ADMINISTRATION OF ITS COMMITMENT TO REVIVE POLITICAL ACTIVITY AND TO HOLD ELECTIONS HAD SOMETHING OF AN AIR OF A SET PIECE. AS COVERAGE OF A FIVE-HOUR LONG MEETING, THE PRESS REPORT WAS UNUSUALLY SPARSE AND, WE PRESUME, REPRESENTS ALL THE REGIME WAS WILLING TO MAKE PUBLIC. THE REPORT DOES ADDRESS ITSELF TO SOME OF THE QUESTIONS ABOUT THE ELECTIONS: APPARENTLY, IF THEY ARE CARRIED OUT SCHEDULE, THEY WILL BE PARLIAMENTARY IN FORM, A CODE OF CONDUCT WILL BE INSTITUTED, THE NUMBER OF PARTIES WILL BE LIMITED, CAMPAIGNING WILL BE RESTRICTED, AND THE THEME WILL BE NATIONAL UNITY IN THE FACE OF INDIAN HOSTILITY. IT WOULD APPEAR THAT THE MLA HOPES TO RESOLVE THE QUESTION OF THE NUMBER OF PARTIES BY WARNING THOSE WITHOUT SIGNIFICANT SUPPORT THAT STANDING FOR ELECTIONS WILL BE FUTILE, THUS ENCOURAGING THEM TO MERGE WITH OTHER MINOR FACTIONS.

5. BY BRINGING TOGETHER POLITICAL LEADERS, STRESSING A CONSENSUS OF VIEWS AND HIGHLIGHTING ANTI-INDIAN THEMES, THE MLA WAS ATTEMPTING TO PRESENT ONCE AGAIN AN IMAGE OF NATIONAL UNITY. FROM PHOTOGRAPHS OF THE MEETING WE RECOGNIZED NUMBER OF POLITICIANS KNOW TO BE BUSILY RE-ORGANIZING FOR THE RESUMPTION OF POLITICAL ACTIVITY. HOWEVER, SINCE NONE WAS IDENTIFIED, THE DECIDED IMPRESSION WAS LEFT THAT IT IS THE VIEWS OF THE MLA ON ELECTIONS WHICH ARE CONTROLLING, NOT THOSE OF THE POLITICIANS. IT CAN

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PROBABLY BE TAKEN FOR GRANTED THAT SOME POLITICAL FACTIONS ARE OUTSIDE THE GOVERNMENT-SET LIMITS, SUCH AS THE JSD, WHICH HAS ISSUED ANOTHER PROTEST CALL, THIS TIME FOR A "NATIONWIDE STRIKE" ON JULY 31. BUT OTHER PARTIES ARE NOW ON PUBLIC NOTICE THAT THEY MUST CONDUCT THEMSELVES WITH CARE IF THEY ARE TO BE PERMITTED TO FUNCTION AND IF THE STILL SOMEWHAT TENUOUS COMMITMENT OF THE GOVERNMENT TO ATTEMPT A RETURN TO CIVILIAN RULE IS TO BE MAINTAINED.

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